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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 000159

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SUBJECT: ASD Vershbow Visit Highlights Regional Security Issues

CLASSIFIED BY: Mitchell Benedict, Political Counselor, DOS, POL;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During separate January 26 meetings, Assistant Secretary of Defense Alexander Vershbow met with Prime Minister Raila Odinga, Defense Minister Yussuf Haji, Chief of Defense Jeremiah Kianga, and Interior Minister George Saitoti. PM Odinga expressed serious concern over regional instability emanating from Somalia and emphasized that the international community has not acted with resolve as needed. The PM was equally concerned about the potential for Sudanese instability before and after the 2011 referendum. Minister Haji expressed his appreciation for defense cooperation and offered new details on Kenya's proposed "Jubaland Initiative" in Southern Somalia. Kenyan officials expressed concern over spillover of violence from Somalia and the flow of Somali refugees into Kenya. END SUMMARY.

USG-KENYA: STRONG PARTNERSHIP

¶2. (C) ASD Vershbow thanked Prime Minister Odinga and Defense Minister Haji for Kenya's strong partnership with the United States—including access to facilities, collaboration with the U.S. to combat terrorism within the Horn of Africa, and Kenya's active role in regional peacekeeping. ASD Vershbow stated that the U.S. appreciates the grave threat to Kenya's security stemming from instability in Somalia and that we share much of Kenya's threat analysis. Emphasizing the importance of reform and change in Kenya, the ASD told PM Odinga the U.S. wants to work with Kenya to address problems emanating from Somalia and Sudan but that in order to be "a strong partner of yours, we also need for Kenya to be a strong country." PM Odinga, citing the recent POTUS telephone calls to Nairobi, expressed confidence that his government will find solutions to their internal political problems so that cooperation with the U.S. can continue. He expressed gratitude for U.S. assistance adding that "we wait to see more." ASD Vershbow assured PM Odinga that the US is very interested in Kenya's success and wants to see our relationship strengthened.

SOMALIA

¶3. (C) PM Odinga stated that worsening conditions in Somalia are of serious concern to Kenya and that instability in Somalia is causing instability in Kenya. He stated that for humanitarian reasons the border with Somalia will unofficially remain open despite the flow of thousands of refugees and arms. He assessed that allowing the TFG to completely collapse would result in a grave situation. He stated that should the TFG fall, al-Shabaab would fill the void. Minister Saitoti said he believes that current levels of assistance directed to the TFG are inadequate and that a significant effort should be made to provide more money and

technical assistance. Saitoti urged the ASD to explore ways to build capacity of the TFG.

¶4. (C) Minister of Defense Haji explained that the border between Kenya and Somalia was of significant concern. He stated that Kenya was deploying additional resources to their eastern border. Minister Saitoti also expressed particular concern over Kenya's border security. He commented that Kenya was receiving 6,000 refugees monthly and outlined major security, economic and environmental implications of the flow. Saitoti said that ethnic Somalis are competing for scarce employment opportunities throughout Kenya and having a negative impact on the tourism industry. Saitoti pointed out the environmental degradation occurring near refugee camps as Kenya's forests were being torn down for use as firewood.

KENYA'S JUBALAND INITIATIVE

¶5. (C) Minister Haji and General Kianga made the case for their proposed Jubaland initiative and asked for our "understanding and support." Kenya has begun to train up to 2,000 Somalis to be deployed against al-Shabaab in Lower and Upper Juba. Addressing U.S. concerns about coordination with the TFG, Kenyan officials claimed that the TFG had requested the initiative, that political

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accommodation between Jubaland and TFG authorities was being worked out, and that the TFG is now recruiting all fighters. The TFG has spoken with many voices on the Jubaland initiative. In our most recent conversation with him, President Sharif provided a qualified endorsement to Department of State Assistant Secretary Carson on the margins of the AU Summit on January 31. Post will continue to monitor closely TFG views on Kenya's Jubaland initiative. Kenyan officials also emphasized their strategic focus on denying al-Shabaab control of the Kismayo port, a key logistics hub. ASD Vershbow agreed that training additional TFG forces was important, but told Ministers Haji and Saitoti that while "you have our understanding, you do not yet have our support."

¶6. (C) Minister Saitoti and Minister Haji pointed out that the international community was assisting both Uganda and Djibouti to trained TFG forces, but was not willing to assist Kenya. Haji asserted that "Kenya deserves to be assisted as Uganda and Djibouti were assisted." Minister Saitoti, sensing no change to U.S. reluctance to support their Jubaland initiative, noted pointedly that the United States has as of yet been unable to propose an alternative strategy to Kenya's Jubaland initiative.

EXTREMIST THREATS

¶7. (C) Both Minister Haji and Minister Saitoti raised concerns about the increasing presence of foreign fighters in Somalia. General Kianga believes that Somalia is becoming a "sanctuary" for foreign terrorists. They believe that al-Shabaab is working closely with AQ and others to increase foreign fighters in the region. They stated that "if al-Shabaab is not contained, Kenya will have a very serious situation to deal with."

SUDAN

¶8. (C) The Kenyan leadership is very concerned about the potential for instability caused by expected deterioration in relations between North and South Sudan. PM Odinga reaffirmed that Kenyan relations with both the North and the South were stable, highlighting the unresolved North/South border issue as a likely future friction point. He stated that there needs to be a peaceful process between the North and South to demarcate the border, and that countries in the region should urge Sudan to address the border issue before the upcoming referendum. He also believes that building governance capacity in South Sudan is critical. He stated that the North continues to arm itself and that the South needs military supplies, equipment, and training. ASD Vershbow agreed there are significant challenges associated with the upcoming referendum and that the U.S. and Kenya need to work closely to minimize regional effects. PM Odinga believes that the road ahead will be rough because he does not see adequate resolve in Khartoum for a peaceful post-referendum Sudan.

¶9. (C) Odinga raised the standstill concerning Southern Sudanese tanks in Kenya. Odinga asserted that the North is heavily armed and that the South is looking for ways to protect themselves. ASD Vershbow told Odinga that he was optimistic that a mutually agreeable solution could be found.

PIRACY

¶10. (C) PM Odinga and Minister Saitoti briefly discussed Somalia piracy and its effects on Kenya. PM Odinga mentioned that piracy money flow has distorted commodity and real estate prices in Kenya, and that imports and exports premium. Describing mainland Somalia as a "reservoir" for piracy, Odinga emphasized the need to "plug the source" and asserted that piracy should be fought on land, rather than the high seas. Minister Saitoti stated that Kenya needs help taking care of Somali pirates in Kenyan prisons.

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¶11. (U) ASD Vershbow cleared this cable.
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